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Lawn&Garden Marketing™

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Cover story: Snowthrower sales

Landscape fabrics • Female L&G buyers

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The merchandising magazine for lawn, garden and leisure living products.

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Cover photograph courtesy of The Toro Co. "From the Editor" photograph by Kevin Anderson.

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Did you know?

The aesthetic value of turf areas have been recognized since emperors in China (157-87 B.C.) maintained extensive mown grass for beauty and enjoyment.

Source: The Lawn Institute

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Snowthrowers sell with ingenuity

Some resourceful retailers found ways to sell snowthrowers this winter even with little or no snow on the ground. These retailers say advertising, the right product and target marketing helped them meet the challenge.

By Steven A. Stone, *editorial assistant*

Selling snowthrowers is definitely a challenge. Snow removal is an uncomfortable chore, and people often avoid thinking about the subject.

A survey in the January issue of *Lawn & Garden Marketing* asked readers for their thoughts on this season's sales. Of the 228 respondents, the majority—86 percent—were power equipment dealers; 14 percent were hardware/home centers.

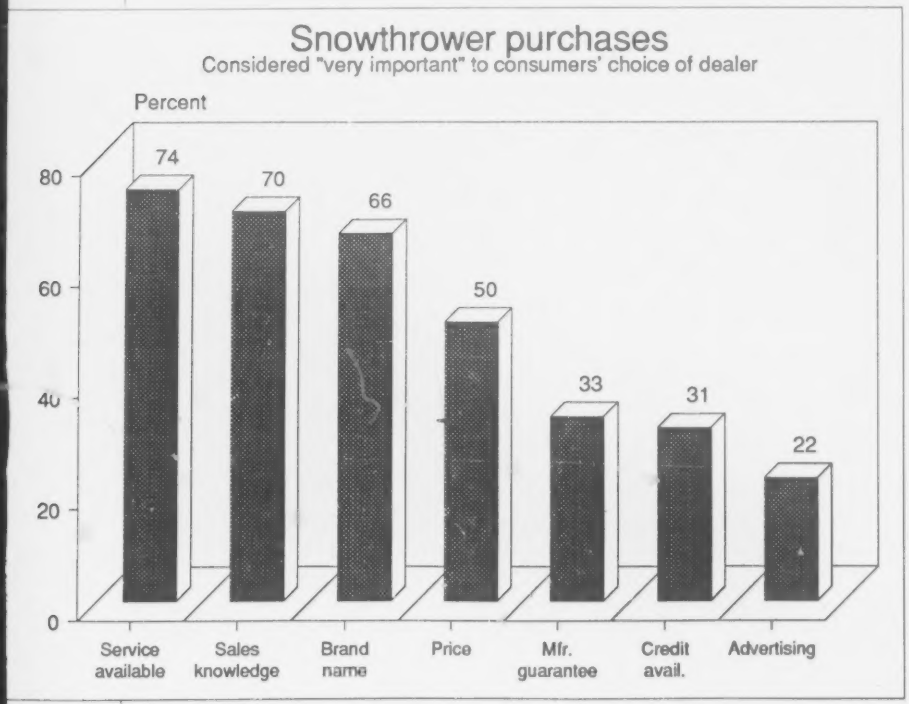
Advertising early helps sales

Considering that respondents most often mentioned October, November and December as the top three months in which their snowthrower sales were made, advertising early can make a difference in total sales for the season. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents said they advertise snowthrowers. Of those who advertise, seven percent begin advertising in August; 33 percent in September, 35 percent in October; and nine percent didn't begin advertising until November.

One power equipment dealer held an attention grabbing event. "One Saturday in October we put up a tent where customers [could] look at our different snowblowers on display, talk to sales reps from the different manufacturers and enjoy hot dogs and hamburgers provided by a local grocery store. We did sell some equipment during our Snowblower Bonanza, but even more people came back later," said Jim Kosciolkio, Fraser Lawn Center Inc., Fraser, Mich. Several other respondents pointed out that pre-season advertising can pay off in sales once snow falls.

Some stressed that cross-merchandising also pays off. One hardware dealer puts the snowblowers near the shovels and salt. "We also put out a copy of *Consumer Reports*, and it doesn't hurt that we carry the top rated models," said Anthony F. Russo, Russo Ace Hardware & Power Equipment, Chicago.

Fifty-one percent of the respondents said they believe advertising is somewhat important to a consumer's decision to buy. The rest of the respondents were nearly evenly divided in their beliefs on advertising's importance: 22 percent said they thought it was very important, but 24 percent said it was not important.



Options consumers look for

Fifty-one percent of the respondents said they think electric start is somewhat important to consumers; 44 percent ranked it very important. "Electric start is a must," said one reader in Illinois.

Self-propelled ability was ranked as very important by 59 percent of the respondents, while 36 percent ranked it as somewhat important. Surprisingly, only 4 percent said track drive was very important.

Forty percent of the retailers thought the level of horsepower was very important to consumers. "Higher horsepower, smaller frame units seem to be the trend," said Wayne Thompson, Dutchess Outdoor Power Equipment Corp., Wap-

Photo courtesy of The Toro Co.

pingers Falls, N.Y., and many respondents agreed with him. Another trend that was noticed by respondents is that "more people are keeping two blowers: a large two-stage for heavy wet snow and small single-stage for smaller, lighter snows," said Susan Gaulle, Speedway Sales and Service, Wauwatosa, Wis.

Price was ranked as very important to consumers' decisions to buy by half the respondents. As for the types offered by stores, most of the respondents had all the bases covered. Eighty-eight percent offered single-stage units; 98 percent offered dual-stage; and 88 percent offered electric units.

What makes a store stand out?

Seventy-four percent of the retailers thought that service availability was very important when customers were deciding where to buy. In contrast, only 33 percent said manufacturers warranties were very important to consumers. This shows that consumers are probably more interested in having a place to get their equipment fixed rather than a promise that it will not break down.

Seventy percent of the respondents rated salespeople's knowledge very important to a customer's purchasing decision. "We try to show a little bit more care," said Kosciolkio, "and our preferred customer program shows that." Modifying an idea that had worked well with lawnmowers, the store offers a free gas can, two cans of free oil every winter and a discount on parts to people who buy snowblowers.

Brand name was ranked very important to consumers by 66 percent of the respondents. Elroy Schalow, M & J Sports Inc., Wausau, Wis., remembers one customer who asked for a particular brand 8-hp snowthrower and bought it without asking the price.

Who's buying snowthrowers?

According to survey results, three types of people are more likely to buy snowthrowers: older people, young professionals and people who already have snowthrowers.

Senior citizens, often aware of potential health dangers of shovelling snow, have more than the usual reasons for wanting to buy a snowthrower. As Schalow pointed out, there are not as many young people shovelling snow for money as there used to be, and older people need a way to clear snow from their drives and walks.

Another reader, Kay Erikson, Highland Repair, St. Paul, Minn., noticed increasing sales to younger professionals. These people often have more disposable income because both wife and husband work, but less time to spend doing chores such as snow removal. They want equipment that will help them get the job done quickly and with as little effort as possible.

People who already have snowblowers also are more likely to purchase snowthrowers. A survey by the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute showed that 36 percent of snowblower sales are replacements. "People who have owned snowblowers that now need replacing, or whose parents owned snowblowers, are our two types of customers," said Schalow.

The key to selling snowthrowers when there's no snow on the ground is to advertise, have the right product and target the people who need them. The threat of snow, along with good salesmanship, will move product. Robert Pennington, Southside Mowers, Tulsa, Okla., said "You would not think Oklahoma would be the place to sell snowthrowers but a little snow goes a long way."

With creative ideas that let the consumer know snowthrowers are an easy alternative to the shovel and salt, sales can increase in your store. —LGM

Power Equipment Report

Buy-back legislation gets attention at state level

Buy-back legislation, a hot topic to dealers, distributors and manufacturers, currently is being considered by several state legislatures. If passed, the laws would require suppliers to buy back equipment from dealers if the supplier terminates the agreement. While the details vary from state to state, all the bills state that the supplier will reimburse the dealer for a certain percentage of the purchase price of new and unused equipment.

Utah's bill was signed into law by its governor in March. A buy back bill in Indiana died in committee. A Kansas bill suffered the same fate, but will be reconsidered in 1990. The Missouri Senate considered a bill at the end of March; another bill is in a House committee.

Norman Beck, executive director of the National Equipment Servicing-Dealers Assn. says his organization would prefer that the government not pass the legislation. "We understand the need for buy back, but rather than leave it to the government, we would much prefer to have it spelled out in contracts with suppliers."

Beck says if contracts with suppliers spelled out the performance requirements and obligations of the dealer and guarantees by the supplier, no such legislation would be needed. NESDA currently is drafting such a contract, which if dealers and suppliers approve, could become an industry standard.

Conference promotes goodwill

More than 100 dealers, distributors and manufacturers met in Cincinnati to discuss industry business practices and ways to make the industry work together more smoothly. The conference was sponsored by the National Equipment-Servicing Dealers Assn.

Topics included direct sales from supplier to end-user, will-fit vs. OEM parts, multi-line inventory vs. one-line dealerships, JIT purchasing vs. dating and more.

Sponsored by NESDA, the conferences are intended to help improve relationships between dealers and suppliers.

CPSC reauthorization yet unknown

U.S. Rep. James Florio, R-N.J., was appointed to a second term as chairman of the House Energy and Consumer Protection and Competitiveness Subcommittee. He intends to introduce a reauthorization bill for the Consumer Product Safety Commission early this session.

The Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, under the direction of new chairman Sen. Richard Bryan, D-Nev., could alter the content of the House bill substantially. However, Bryan was a strong consumer advocate when he was attorney general and governor of Nevada.

'88 portable power shipments/'89 forecast

Respondents to the 1989 survey of manufacturers of gas portable power equipment and their component parts said shipments increased in 1988 vs. 1987—particularly in blower categories—but less substantial increases are expected in 1989.

	1988 vs. 1987	1989 projections
Chainsaws	+ 2%	NC
Trimmers/brushcutters	+10%	+ 4%
Hand-held blowers	+42%	+ 1%
Back pack blowers	+20%	+ 6%
Portable generators	+ 4%	NC

NC = no change forecasted
Source: Portable Power Equipment Mfrs. Assn.

Briefs

• Husqvarna Power Products, Itasca, Ill. has changed its name to **Husqvarna Forest & Garden.** The new name more accurately reflects the company's offerings, says William Farrell, president of marketing and distribution in North America.

• Richard E. Robinson is now serving as president and CEO of **Snapper Power Equipment,** McDonough, Ga. Clifford H. Boylston, executive vice-president, has added the responsibilities of all engineering and manufacturing. Don B. Weakly was named executive vice-president. Russell Rouse was appointed vice-president of engineering, and Frank Hancock is vice-president of customer service.

• Alan Y. Levanson was promoted to president of **Homelite Division of Textron Inc.,** Charlotte, N.C. He formerly was vice-president of marketing and sales.

• The National Equipment-Servicing Dealer's Assn. elected officers for 1989: president, Jerome Novekosky, Novekosky's Lawn Mower Center, Big Sewickley, Pa.; vice president, Joanne Klee, Jim's Lawn Equipment Inc., Cheektowaga, N.Y.; secretary, Elaine Foltynewicz, Richard's Lawn & Garden, Ottawa, Ill.; and treasurer, Kenneth Watjen, Georgie's Power Equipment, North Dartmouth, Mass.

• **Briggs & Stratton,** Milwaukee, has been awarded a federal grant for promoting literacy in the workplace. There will be courses in reading, writing, math, technical areas and other subjects. The classes will be offered year round and will feature computer aided, individualized, self-paced study.

• David H. Morris has been elected president of **The Toro Co.,** Minneapolis. He was formerly COO of the company and will retain that position.

• Richard H. Webb was named OEM accounts manager for **Lawn-Boy,** Plymouth, Wis. Steve Wells was appointed product manager for the heaters, trimmers and tillers division.

• A patent has been granted to **Simplicity Mfg. Inc.,** Port Washington, Wis., for its Turbo Collection system. Through a belt-driven steel fan blade, the system allows users to collect heavy grass and leaf clippings in a single pass.

Retail Marketplace

GCA clinic offers retailers management assistance

Garden center retailers got some insight into how others manage businesses under stressful conditions and a forecast for the future of the industry during two retail seminars at the Garden Centers of America Management Clinic in February.

"A drought is an opportunity," said Louis Hillenmeyer III, of Hillenmeyer Nurseries, Lexington, Ky. The panelist cited examples of how his company turned negative media coverage of the drought into positive publicity for his company and actually created sales.

"I thought the industry had to take a positive look," he said. So, Hillenmeyer went to the press and offered tips on how to preserve water, how to reuse air-conditioner and dish water, and suggested watering practices. Employees of the company were advised on how to sell products like mulch, soaker hoses, root feeders and the like. Hillenmeyer said the efforts paid off both in the form of good will and sales.

In a separate seminar, Manny Shemin of Shemin Nursery, Greenwich, Conn., discussed problems facing the future of the industry. He cited the industry's approach of being production-driven rather than market-driven and the shortage of quality labor as two critical problems.

"The consumer is the last person that has been considered," said Shemin. "I think it is time that as a united industry we find out what the public wants and find a way to give it to them (rather than let the manufacturer decide.)" Shemin said he felt the effort was essential for the industry to effectively combat other leisure industries for disposable income.

The shortage of quality labor is another problem. Shemin said enrollment in horticulture fields has declined significantly at universities in the last 10 years; he credited low pay and few incentives as major factors. "There is something about our industry that is not desirable, and wages are the most important factor." Shemin said increasing employee wages was critical to the longevity of the industry; and he suggested that employers hire good business people and train them in horticulture. "The success of your business depends on it."

The seminars were just two of five retail sessions offered at the annual clinic held in Louisville, Ky.

Quikrete sues Nomix

The Quikrete® Co., Atlanta, has won the right to proceed in a lawsuit against Nomix Corp., Conn., for antitrust violation and illegal patent activities involving Quikrete® Fast-Setting Concrete. Evidence showed that Nomix had attempted to go beyond the patent law and had threatened Quikrete and its licensed manufacturers.

Quikrete® initiated a suit against Nomix in May 1988, as a result of threats and allegations by Nomix claiming that Quikrete Fast-Setting Concrete infringed on its patent for a similar product. Nomix filed a suit in July 1988 in Connecticut against Quikrete for patent infringement and contested Quikrete's right to proceed in Georgia. There is a dispute over whether Nomix has a valid patent to "method of application." Quikrete claims that they have another product, which uses the same method in question, that has been on the market since 1952.

A federal district judge in Atlanta soon will determine whether Quikrete infringed on Nomix's patent or not. Quikrete also charges Nomix with harassing customers and impairing the free enterprise system.

Gardening tips broadcast nationwide

"Up and Growing," a new series of one-minute gardening tips, currently is running on CNN and HNN. The shows are scheduled to air at least 30 times per week starting this month and run through August. Security Products Co., Atlanta, is sponsoring this educational series.

They feature Jim Bennett, who also hosts "The Weekend Gardener" series that airs weekly on cable and syndicated commercial TV stations.

Briefs

• The National Lawn & Garden Distributors Assn. will hold its annual convention June 29 - July 2 in Vancouver, British Columbia. The NLGDA hopes to increase the value of its meeting by holding it before the National Hardware Show® and encouraging manufacturers to preview their new products to the distributors. The NLGDA previously has held its convention in September.

• **Novelty Mfg.,** Lancaster, Pa., added 13,500 sq. ft. to its facility. of production, storage and employee facilities. The additional space is devoted to the manufacturing of the company's new gutter cover, expansion of its flower box bracket manufacturing, expanded paint storage and warehousing.

Analysis of 1988/1989 landscape sales

The majority of respondents to the 14th annual landscape business survey said that sales had increased in 1988 vs. 1987; they are expecting a positive sales year in 1989 as well.

	% Indicating sales		
1988 sales:	**Up**	**Same**	**Down**
New residential	74%	9%	17%
Residential renovation	69%	21%	10%
Residential maintenance	63%	31%	6%
1989 sales forecast:	**Up**	**Same**	**Down**
New residential	84%	12%	4%
Residential renovation	78%	21%	1%
Residential maintenance	61%	32%	7%

Source: National Landscape Assn. 1989 survey

Distributors look to the future

The emphasis was on taking the power equipment business into the '90s at the ninth annual gathering of the Outdoor Power Equipment Distributors Assn. The group met for its annual meeting in late February in Tucson.

New officers elected for 1989 term

Jim Kenney, Kenney Machinery Corp., Indianapolis, will serve OPEDA as its new president for 1989. In the vice president's position is Richard Fischer, Branch Distributing, Minneapolis. Steven Redan, KPM Distributors, Kenvil, N.J., is the new secretary; and Steve Holloway, KanCo Distributing, Wichita, Kan., will serve as treasurer.

Although the emphasis was on the '90s, thoughts were on the '80s. Noting the toll the drought had on the industry this year, W. Scott Smith, past OPEDA president reminded attendees, "It will rain again. Let's keep the faith."

Guest speakers for the three-day event included economist Larry Chimerine, chairman and CEO of Wharton Econometric Forecasting Associates. Chimerine talked about issues facing today's economy.

Chimerine said the United States has experienced one of the longest periods of economic growth in history. He credited the sustained growth with the intensity of the 1982 recession, pent up demands, decreased taxes, foreign finance of debt, low oil prices and low interest rates.

Although Chimerine said he is not predicting a recession, he said the business sector will not see the rate of growth it has seen recently. "If there is going to be a recession, there is no evidence that one is here or is about to begin. Interest rates are moving up, but not enough to choke the economy; credit is still available; consumer optimism is high....So, we'll see slower economic growth. A two percent annual growth will not be spectacular, but not threatening."

He credited three factors in reducing economic growth: loss of competitiveness in the world marketplace, large private debt and the large federal deficit. He said the industries that are slowing are those that are dependent on domestic sales. "The retailing segment is simply not as buoyant as it has been," he said.

Chimerine foresees a slower and riskier

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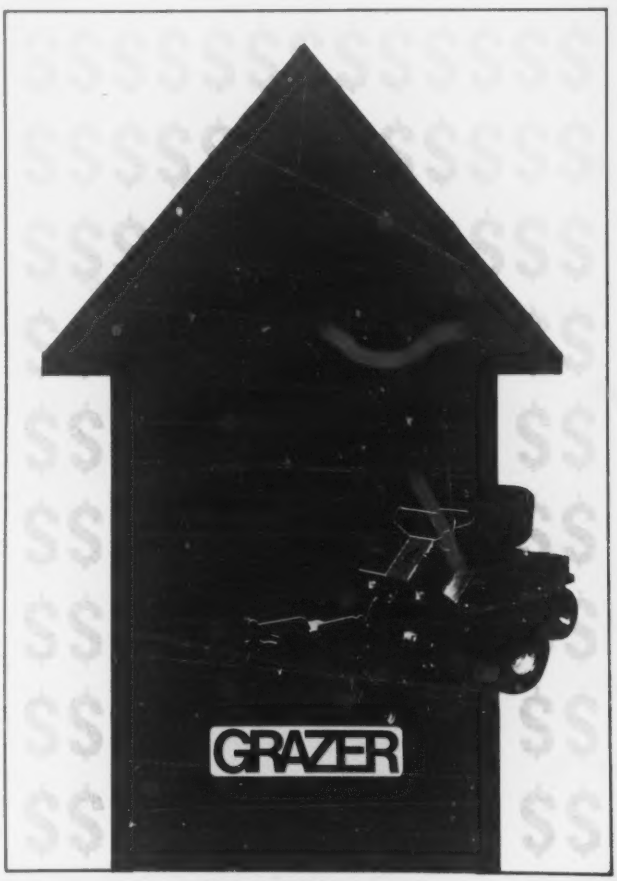

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business environment. He advised, "Don't jump into a bomb shelter but be more conscious and conservative, focus on cost side, improve productivity, be flexible and be selective."

Seminar mixes business with humor

In another session, distributors and OPEDA associate members were treated to a humorous look at common business sense. Ed Foreman, Executive Development Systems, Dallas, showed attendees "How to make every day a good day," through the power of positive thinking. "It's not so important what happens to you as how you react to it," he explained. "Talking about a bad situation makes it worse."

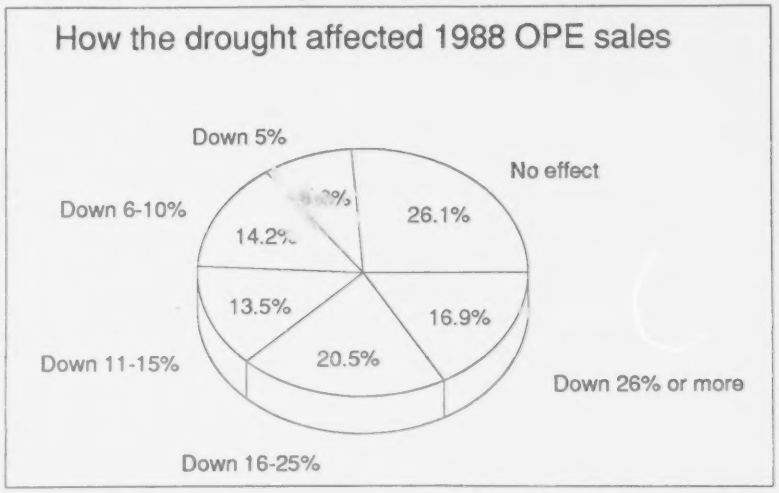
OPE dealers profiled

During one morning business session, *Lawn & Garden Marketing* presented a glimpse of its recent study profiling the power equipment dealer. The study was produced by *LGM* with the cooperation of OPEDA.

The study includes power equipment consumer profiles and motivations; retailer media choices; use of co-op; product knowledge; and rankings of distributor incentives and services.

Some results from the survey showed that only 26 percent of power equipment dealers say the 1988 drought did not affect 1988 sales. Yet, 9 percent said sales were down 5 percent; 28 percent said sales were down 6-15 percent; 20 percent said sales were down 16-25 percent; and 17 percent said sales were down 26 percent or more.

Further results from the study will be published in the July issue of *LGM;* the complete study, which consists of more than 100 pages, will be for sale later this year. **—LGM**



Lawn & Garden Marketing presented a sampling of the results of its study of outdoor power equipment dealers at the meeting, including information such as this. Additional results will be published in the July issue of LGM.

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